

By: Lynn Westmoreland and Tom Rooney

Exclusive to [Politico](#)

February 15, 2011 01:03 PM EST

The American people sent a message in November that Congress needs to cut spending. Last year, House Republicans made a Pledge to America, promising big changes in Washington — including cutting \$100 billion from the fiscal 2011 budget.

Voters expect us to keep that promise. They are holding our feet to the fire — as they should. It's time we showed them we are serious about following through.

That is why we, along with Reps. John Larson (D-Conn.) and Chellie Pingree (D-Maine), plan to offer a bipartisan amendment to the spending bill on the floor this week to end funding for the extra engine of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter — shutting down this wasteful program once and for all.

Our amendment could save taxpayers \$450 million this year alone and billions more in the years to come.

If you're not familiar with this estimated \$6 billion earmark, here's the back story. In 2001, after a competitive bidding process, the Pentagon selected the F135 engine for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. However, Congress continued to earmark billions of dollars for another contractor to build an alternate F136 engine. This was highly unusual — since most military aircraft don't require an alternate engine.

Despite bipartisan opposition, this extra engine is the earmark that refuses to die. President

George W. Bush tried to kill the program during his last two years in office. President Barack Obama last year threatened to veto any legislation that included the program, and the Senate overwhelmingly voted to defund it. Unfortunately, that vote failed in the House, and the president did not carry through on his veto threat. So the earmark continued.

This program, which the Pentagon repeatedly has said it does not want or need, already has cost taxpayers about \$3 billion. The Pentagon estimates it will cost an additional \$3 billion to complete development.

So if Congress doesn't rein in its appetite for spending — and stop funding this unnecessary alternate engine — taxpayers are very likely to spend \$6 billion to complete its development. Not to mention the billions more they'll pony up for production and maintenance. All for an engine our military leaders say they don't even want.

Eliminating this wasteful spending program should be a no-brainer. As we look to keep our promise and make \$100 billion in cuts, we cannot afford to keep luxuries like a second engine.

A defense dollar wasted is one we won't have for vital equipment to keep our country safe. The Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps have consistently said the extra engine not only wastes scarce dollars, it also complicates their missions.

As Defense Secretary Robert Gates said, "Spending more money on an extra engine simply makes no sense and diverts limited modernization funds from more pressing DoD priorities." Funding the extra engine, Marine Corps Brig. Gen. David Heinz said, would "take 50 to 80 tails [Joint Strike Fighters] out of the program."

The Joint Strike Fighter is a crucial link in the defense of freedom. But this particular program does nothing to aid its work. The extra engine will not make our country any safer, but it will take limited resources away from our troops.

Getting federal spending under control must be one of Congress's top priorities — it certainly is among our constituents' most pressing concerns. If we can't cut funding for the extra engine

program, which is unwanted by our military leaders, how can we convince the American people that we are serious about getting our deficits under control?

Rep. Lynn Westmoreland (R-Ga.) serves on the House Financial Services Committee and the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. Rep. Tom Rooney (R-Fla.) serves on the House Armed Services Committee and the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.